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**Human rights questions: human rights situations and reports
of special rapporteurs and representatives**

**Letter dated 2 November 2005 from the Permanent
Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to transmit herewith a memorandum on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 71 (c).

(Signed) Kyaw Tint Swe



Annex to the letter dated 2 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Memorandum on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly adopted resolution 59/263 on the situation of human rights in Myanmar on 23 December 2004. The main focus of this country-specific resolution was obviously not the situation of human rights but rather Myanmar's political situation. It also indicated how some powerful countries would like to see the democratization process in Myanmar. While the resolution purports to promote human rights in Myanmar, its real aim was to dictate the domestic political process of a sovereign Member State.

2. The resolution was mainly based on unsubstantiated allegations by remnant insurgents and anti-government groups that were waging a war of disinformation on Myanmar with generous funding assistance from some Western countries. The resolution was biased, intrusive, selective, subjective and highly politicized. The resolution was contrary to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations as it delved into matters that were essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign country. For the aforementioned reasons, Myanmar rejected the unfounded allegations contained in the resolution and dissociated itself from the adoption of resolution 59/263.

3. The annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/60/1) has included a paragraph on the issue of Myanmar under the chapter on achieving peace and security and not under that on human rights. This further substantiated the fact that the resolution on Myanmar has nothing to do with the promotion of human rights but is part of the political agenda to interfere in the internal affairs of Myanmar by attempting to portray Myanmar as a source of peace and security. The report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, dated 10 October 2005 (A/60/422 and Corr.1), once again unmasked its real intention to meddle in the domestic political process of a sovereign Member State rather than to promote human rights in the country.

4. The present memorandum is being circulated to provide accurate information regarding the situation of human rights in Myanmar. It focuses in particular on important developments that have occurred in Myanmar during the past year. These include the reconvening of the National Convention, its steadfast adherence to the continued implementation of the seven-step political road map for a transition to a peaceful, modern, developed and democratic state as well as the Government's efforts for socio-economic developments of the country to fulfil the right to development of the people.

II. Developments in Myanmar

5. The people of Myanmar hold title to an ancient civilization. In view of the long history of harmony and amity among the national races, but for its bitter legacy as a colony, Myanmar would have been a more united nation.

6. An interval of over a century of colonial misrule constituted fertile soil for sowing seeds of mistrust and misunderstanding among the national races. From the dawn of independence in 1948 until the advent of the present Government, the resultant insurgencies of varying ideologies and affiliations convulsed the nation.
7. The economy was ravaged by the Second World War. The armed insurgencies further drained and stunted the normal process of development. The insurgencies defied successive governments to find a lasting solution.
8. The armed forces (the Tatmadaw) had to assume State power in 1988 to stem the anarchy and lawlessness that had taken the country to the brink of disintegration. The Tatmadaw Government abolished the single party socialist system as well as the rigid centralized economy and embarked on instituting reforms for a multiparty democratic system and a market-oriented economy.
9. The Government enunciated a set of 12 political, social and economic objectives to address the fundamental issues facing the nation. It initiated a process of national reconciliation to consolidate national unity.
10. To find a solution to the insurgencies, the Tatmadaw leadership used creative efforts, underpinned by sincerity and goodwill, to incrementally build confidence between the Government and the armed insurgent groups with different political affiliations.
11. Whereas preceding Governments demanded total surrender, the present Government invited the armed groups to give peace a chance, allowing them in the interim confidence-building period to continue holding on to their arms. As a result, 17 major and another 17 smaller armed groups have come back into the fold. They are now extensively engaged in respective regional development programmes, together with the Government. As never before, peace and tranquillity now prevail throughout the length and breadth of the country.
12. A ceasefire with all the 17 armed groups remains in place and the representatives of these groups are actively participating in the National Convention process.
13. The Government convened a National Convention in 1992 with the participation of the National League for Democracy (NLD) to formulate basic principles for a new democratic State constitution. However, in 1995 the NLD unilaterally boycotted the process and withdrew its delegates. For that reason the Convention had to be adjourned in the following year.
14. Desirous that all major players in the country participate for the benefit of the nation as a whole, the Government invited and held discussions with leaders of various national races and political parties, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD.
15. She was encouraged by the Government to travel freely in the country to see first hand the Government's infrastructural projects and to obtain a better insight into the developmental achievements of the nation. During these visits she was extended all courtesies and hospitalities. Between June 2002 and April 2003, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visited 95 townships in various states and divisions in the country. However, during her later visits, being misled by certain political elements, she unfortunately reneged on the agreed ground rules, including security

arrangements of the Government, and failed to abide by the terms of agreement with the authorities concerned.

16. Despite the advice by the authorities not to travel to areas where there was no police or security, on the night of 30 May 2003, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her followers nevertheless went to Dabayin in Sagaing Division, where an unfortunate confrontation between her followers and local people turned violent. The Government was compelled to adopt certain measures to maintain law and order to protect Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her senior colleagues from harm. A criminal inquest was instituted regarding this incident.

17. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Razali Ismail, met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the course of his tenth visit to Myanmar in June 2003. Contrary to the allegations based on so-called eyewitness accounts, he confirmed that she was safe and unhurt. Subsequently, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also visited her and her senior colleagues and confirmed that they were well treated.

18. The Special Envoy visited Myanmar again from 30 September to 2 October 2003. He visited Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and confirmed that she was well and in good spirits, recovering from recent major surgery she had undergone for a gynaecological problem at a private hospital.

19. In any case the resulting climate created by false rumours and misinformation set back the carefully nurtured dialogue yet again.

III. Recent political developments in Myanmar

20. On 30 August 2003, the Government of Myanmar outlined a seven-step political programme for a transition to democracy. The road map was overwhelmingly welcomed in the country and was well received by neighbours and friends of Myanmar.

21. The ninth summit meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held in Bali, Indonesia, in November 2003, welcomed the positive developments in Myanmar and characterized the road map as a "pragmatic approach deserving understanding and support".

22. The Secretary-General, in response to a communication from the Prime Minister of Myanmar in September 2003, stated that he was encouraged by the adoption of the Government of its own road map for a transition to democracy and committed the United Nations to help facilitate the effort.

23. The first crucial step of the road map, the reconvening of the National Convention, was taken on 17 May 2004. The Convention was attended by 1,088 delegates. Only 44 delegates declined the invitation to participate: 33 from NLD, 8 from its affiliate the Shan NLD and 3 from a minor Kokang group. The Convention was much more inclusive than the previous one, which was composed of only 700 delegates. Of the total of 1,088 delegates, 633 were from the various national races. Additionally, it was attended by over 100 delegates representing 17 major and another 17 smaller armed groups who had returned to the fold.

24. The first session of the Convention focused upon the issue of powersharing between the Central Government and the states and regions. This is an issue of

much importance to Myanmar, a union of 135 national races. The states and regions will have their own executive and legislative bodies in the envisaged new structure.

25. The complex and sensitive nature of the issue resulted in time-consuming and at times intense discussions. The second session was held from 17 February to 31 March 2005 to lay down basic principles for a new State constitution. The next session of the National Convention has been scheduled to begin on 5 December 2005 to consider and approve the basic principles in accordance with the proposals by the delegates with regard to executive and judicial powers.

26. A common desire among the delegates to ensure the success of the road map was evident throughout the successive sessions of the National Convention.

27. The credibility of the Convention has never been questioned by any quarter within the nation except by NLD and its affiliate, the Shan NLD. The two parties declined the personally delivered invitations extended by the Convention conveners to participate in this important process. Putting the personal and party interest over the national interest, they failed in their bid to sway public opinion away from supporting the National Convention.

28. The Government of Myanmar, in its communication of 18 September 2004, assured the Secretary-General of its unsparing efforts to ensure the success of the Convention, which would lead to the successful drafting and an adoption by referendum of a democratic State constitution. Free and fair elections would then be held in which the people of Myanmar will elect leaders of their choice. The Government, under the new Prime Minister, again assured that all previous political commitments of the Government would be honoured. It should be noted here that the seven-step road map was conceived and implemented by the decision of the State Peace and Development Council and the Government formed by it.

29. Myanmar is fully capable of overcoming its national challenges. The international community could best help by allowing Myanmar to resolve domestic issues by herself. The political development in Myanmar falls entirely under her domestic jurisdiction.

IV. Cooperation with the United Nations

30. Myanmar strictly adheres to the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and as such, cooperation with the United Nations is the cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy. Myanmar has consistently cooperated with the United Nations in many fields including in the area of human rights, providing necessary information sought by United Nations bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights and its thematic rapporteurs.

31. Although Myanmar has dissociated itself consistently from the resolutions on the situation of human rights in Myanmar adopted annually by the Third Committee without a vote, due to lack of balance and objectivity of those resolutions, in the spirit of cooperation Myanmar has nevertheless welcomed the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Razali Ismail, to Myanmar on a total of 14 occasions, and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, six times.

32. In the past year, Myanmar has provided information and responded to communications sought by thematic rapporteurs and the questionnaire from the Independent Expert for the study on violence against children.

33. United Nations high dignitaries visited Myanmar during 2005 and those visits have further promoted Myanmar's cooperation with the United Nations. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific region Anti-AIDS Campaign, Mrs. Nafis Sadik, visited Myanmar in February; Mr. James T. Morris, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, visited Myanmar in August and H.E. Mr. Ali Alatas, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on United Nations Reform, visited Myanmar in September. In each of these visits, the high dignitaries from the United Nations were cordially received by Myanmar's Head of Government. During the visit of H.E. Mr. Ali Alatas to Myanmar as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on United Nations Reform in August 2005, he was received by H.E. Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council. Earlier in April 2005, H.E. Senior General Than Shwe had met and held discussions with the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the sidelines of the Asian-Africa Summit in Jakarta. The Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council extended a cordial invitation to the Secretary-General to visit Myanmar at a mutually convenient date. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. U Nyan Win, also met with Mr. Razali Ismail, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, in Vientiane in November 2004.

34. In its efforts to fight illicit narcotic drugs, Myanmar cooperated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Myanmar's Central Committee for Drug Control has been collaborating with UNODC in Myanmar's endeavours to eradicate opium poppy production. According to the Myanmar Opium Survey Report, released by UNODC in November 2005, there was an 80 per cent decline in opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar between 1996 and 2005.

V. Human rights initiatives

35. Myanmar recognizes that the process of promoting and protecting human rights should be conducted in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter and international law. The Charter places human rights in the context of international cooperation. Human rights issues must be addressed with objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Myanmar firmly believes that there should not be double standards nor politicization of human rights issues.

36. A National Human Rights Committee was formed in April 2000 and since then the National Committee has been actively engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights. A series of workshops has been held for disseminating information on human rights standards for public officials. Later, the dissemination process was widened to benefit a larger range of citizens. Starting from the 2004/2005 academic year, human rights lessons have been introduced as part of the official curriculum in the middle and high schools. The lessons are based on Myanmar's Child Law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, bringing the dissemination of human rights to yet another level.

VI. The issue of child soldiers

37. As a result of tremendous pressure from some politically motivated non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Myanmar Government Army, Tatmadaw (Ky), was unjustly listed in annex II, "Other parties in armed conflict that recruit or use children in armed forces", to the report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council in 2003 (A/58/546-S/2003/1053), citing unverified information provided by Human Rights Watch (see para. 56). The preposterous allegations of 70,000 child soldiers in the Government Army is a result of interviewing 20 or so insurgents by a freelance reporter inside a neighbouring country. No United Nations agency in Myanmar has verified this exaggerated allegation. Yet this falsehood was cited in the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and has subsequently found its way into the resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. In fact, it is the practice of insurgent groups to recruit and use child soldiers, as testified by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar in his report (E/CN.4/2003/41).

38. Myanmar is obviously not a nation in a situation of armed conflict. With the returning to the legal fold of 17 armed groups, it has become a nation enjoying unprecedented peace and stability since its regaining independence. However, the emotional and sensitive issue of child soldiers is being exploited by some Western Governments, NGOs and well financed anti-Government expatriate groups in a concerted disinformation campaign with an ill intention to create an environment for the international community to mount political pressure upon Myanmar.

39. The truth of the matter is that the Myanmar Armed Forces, including Tatmadaw (Ky), is an all volunteer army and those joining the military service do so of their own free will. Under the Myanmar Defence Services and the War Office Council instruction 13/73 of 1974, a person cannot enlist in the armed forces until he has attained the age of 18. There is neither a draft system nor forced conscription by the Government of Myanmar. Forced conscription in any form is strictly prohibited. In order to ensure the voluntary nature of recruitment as well as minimum age requirements, the Office of the Adjutant-General, Ministry of Defence, had followed up with periodic instructions. Those who are found to contravene these instructions have had action taken against them under military law. Myanmar has instituted scrutiny and inspection procedures and demobilized those who do not conform to minimum age requirements or other qualifications.

40. To further strengthen effective implementation, a Committee for the Prevention of the Military Recruitment of Underage Children was established on 5 January 2004. The Committee has set up a task force comprising the representatives from relevant line Ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

41. To realize its objectives the Committee adopted a plan of action on 5 October 2004. It includes recruitment procedures, procedures for discharge from military service, reintegration into society, public awareness measures, punitive action to be taken against transgressors, reporting measures, submission of recommendations and consultation and cooperation with international organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ICRC and the United Nations resident coordinator.

42. As part of the implementation process of the plan of action, the following concrete measures have already been taken step by step according to the plan:

- The Child Law of 1993, adopted in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has been translated into six different languages of major national races. Copies of those translated versions of the law have been widely distributed in the areas of respective national races in line with the plan of action.
- Inspections are being made at the recruitment stage, training stage and military service entry stage to ensure that recruitments are in compliance with the orders, regulations and directives issued in that regard.
- A new directorate was established on 23 July 2004 under the Office of the Adjutant-General to oversee strict adherence to the orders, regulations and directives in the selection process of new recruits, in particular to ensure compliance with the minimum age requirement of 18 years.
- The demobilization process, which has been in place for years, is now more pronounced with the launching of the action plan. New recruits, if found to be under 18 years at the training centres or in the military service, are being demobilized. During the past three years, a total of 912 new recruits were demobilized including 210 recruits for not meeting the minimum age requirement.

43. In many contexts around the world where it is difficult to determine the exact age of a young person, due to lack of identity documentation, minors are recruited into the armed forces. As part of measures to address the issue, the Government is implementing a programme with the assistance of UNICEF in Myanmar to enhance the Birth Registration/Vital Registration System.

VII. Trafficking in persons

44. Trafficking in persons is a grave transnational issue that has negative consequences for peace and security and for development. Only a coordinated and collective response will ensure the elimination of the threat. Myanmar has made considerable progress in its fight against human trafficking both in the national and regional context. Nationwide preventive and supportive activities, such as awareness-raising among the community and its leaders, capacity-building of its volunteers, including educational talks on trafficking and violence against women and supportive services are conducted extensively by national NGOs.

45. In the regional context, Myanmar actively participated in the Bali process. In a strengthened regional multisectoral response in the greater Mekong subregion, through the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative, an agreement was signed in Yangon in October 2004. Following the agreement reached in Yangon, a plan of action to fight human trafficking was adopted in Hanoi in 2005.

46. In March 2004, Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and two of its supplementary protocols, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. The Anti-Human Trafficking Law, which conforms to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, was enacted in September

2005, bringing Myanmar's commitment to fight human trafficking to yet another level. According to this law, the maximum penalty for serious offenders will be a life sentence.

VIII. The issue of forced labour

47. Myanmar has been cooperating with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in resolving the issue of forced labour. In the past, some provisions of the Village Act and Towns Act of 1907, which it inherited from the British colonial administration, were alleged to be in conflict with Convention 29 of ILO (Forced Labour Convention of 1930). Although those Acts were in force since 1907, the allegations of forced labour were never levelled critically against Myanmar at ILO until a few years after the present Government took the State power. The Government of Myanmar, with a view to addressing the issue, took the necessary legislative, executive and administrative measures and issued two legislative orders: Order 1/99 and Order Supplementing Order 1/99, thereby bringing domestic legislation in line with Convention 29.

48. As part of its cooperative measures with ILO, the Government had invited an ILO technical cooperation mission to Myanmar four times during 2001 and 2002. A high-level team of ILO (HLT) led by a former Governor-General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephens, also paid a successful two-week visit to Myanmar in September and October 2001. An agreement between the Government and ILO in March 2002 led to the appointment of an ILO liaison officer in Myanmar.

49. Myanmar also agreed to receive the visit of a very high-level team from ILO (vHLT) in February 2005. On behalf of the State Peace and Development Council, the Prime Minister of the Government of the Union of Myanmar received the vHLT on 22 February 2005 and, in his letter of 10 March 2005 to the vHLT, reiterated Myanmar's commitment to the elimination of the vestiges of forced labour in close cooperation with ILO. Just a week after the visit of the vHLT to Myanmar, a focal point in the armed forces for dealing with Convention 29, headed by a Deputy Adjutant-General and assisted by seven General Staff Officers (Grade-1), was established on 1 March 2005. The Government of Myanmar has fully cooperated with the ILO liaison officer ad interim in dealing with the complaints relating to requisition of forced labour. Actions have been taken against all 50 cases in 2004 and a further 8 cases in 2005 reported by the ILO liaison officer ad interim.

50. There have been allegations by some anti-Government elements that the Government takes action on those who contact and provide information on forced labour to the ILO liaison officer ad interim. This is utterly untrue for the court has clearly ruled that under no circumstances do contacts and cooperation by a citizen with ILO or other United Nations organizations constitute a criminal offence.

51. Myanmar is firmly committed to the eradication of forced labour in the country and spares no effort in taking necessary measures in this regard.

IX. Religious tolerance

52. Madame Sadako Ogata, a leading United Nations personality, after her visit to the country, cited Myanmar as a "model society" for religious tolerance. Yet some continued to allege religious intolerance in the country. Although Buddhism is the religion of the majority of the people, other religions such as Christianity, Islam and

Hinduism coexist and flourish in Myanmar. The Government provides all necessary assistance to encourage and maintain inter-religious harmony and freedom of worship. Any allegations of religious intolerance in Myanmar are groundless and politically motivated.

X. Economic development

53. When the Government took over State duties in 1988, it inherited a centrally planned economic system that resulted in an alarming economic decline. The Government made a 180 degree shift in its economic policy, replaced the centrally planned economic system with a market-oriented economic one and made a series of economic reform measures including inviting foreign investments and encouragement of private-sector development. It made a firm resolve to meet the aspirations of the people and to build a modern nation with all-round development in a systematic manner. During the period from 1989-1990 to 1991-1992, the Government focused upon restoring stability in the country while implementing plans to halt the economic slide. In the following years, the economy grew by 7.5 per cent during the period from 1992-1993 to 1995-1996 and 8.5 per cent during the period from 1996-1997 to 2000-2001. Presently the third short-term five-year plan (2001-2002 to 2005-2006) is being implemented and the economy grew 1.6 times by the end of the fourth year of the current five-year plan.

54. Economic infrastructure development is an essential prerequisite in raising the economic and social life of the people. During its brief tenure, the present Government has made massive infrastructure developments resulting in the construction of 176 dams, 202 major bridges and 60,000 kilometres of motorways. In the education sector, 124 new universities have been opened nationwide, the adult literacy rate is nearly 94 per cent and primary school enrolment has reached 98 per cent. The number of primary, middle and high schools increased from 33,923 in 1990 to 40,525 in 2004. The Government spares no effort to improve the quality of education. Reforms in the official curriculum and assessment methodology have been undertaken and the use of ICT is strongly encouraged. In the health sector, 188 new hospitals have been opened for the people. A total of 68 billion kyats has been used for development of the remote border areas where national races mostly reside. In Myanmar, a safe drinking water supply programme for water-scarce rural areas has been carried out for years and will continue during the third short-term plan period 2001-2005. According to multiple indicator cluster surveys, access to safe drinking water has increased from 32 per cent in 1990 to 72 per cent in 2000. Access to improved sanitation has also increased during the past decade from 36 per cent in 1990 to 83 per cent in 2000. Because of these economic and social developments, Myanmar since a few years back has been classified as a country "enjoying medium human development" by the *Human Development Report* issued annually by the United Nations Development Programme.

55. It is the paramount task of the Government to achieve economic growth and social progress in promoting the economic and social lives of the people. To that end, Myanmar has been implementing the National Development Plan with the aim of accelerating growth, achieving equitable and balanced development and reducing the socio-economic development gap between rural and urban areas of the country. The major aspects of the Millennium Development Goals are also incorporated in the National Development Plan.

56. With a view to achieving balanced development and to narrowing down the socio-economic development gap between rural and urban areas, the Government has been implementing the three National Development Programmes, namely (a) Border Areas Development Programme; (b) Plan for 24 Special Development Zones; and (c) Integrated Rural Development Plan. This has resulted in significant progress in various sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure and agriculture. Myanmar has scored discernible achievements in carrying out its National Development Programmes reflecting the Millennium Development Goals.

57. Myanmar is thus making satisfactory progress towards reaching Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In its drive to alleviate poverty, the Government has achieved significant results through designation of 24 special development zones among the states and divisions of the country to achieve equitable and balanced development throughout the country. The implementation of development plans in these zones includes the promotion of tertiary education facilities to bring education to the children residing in remote border areas. Today there are 790 schools in the border areas mostly inhabited by national races where there were only 28 schools 15 years ago. For balanced and proportionate development, universities and colleges were also set up in the states and divisions for capacity-building of the local populations for their long-term development. In the area of education for all, net enrolment in primary education was 84.5 per cent in 2005 with 74.5 per cent being able to complete its full course. Net enrolment is expected to reach 99 per cent by 2015. In the health sector, Myanmar is now free from diseases such as smallpox, leprosy and polio. The Government has designated HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as diseases of national concern and is taking effective measures to address these serious challenges. It is also actively participating in the international community's efforts to combat the scourge, through its membership in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board.

58. Despite the attempts by some Western powers to deny the right to development of the people in Myanmar by blocking assistance, the Government of Myanmar is making all out efforts to achieve equitable development throughout the country with its own available resources to fulfil the economic and social rights of its own people.

XI. Conclusion

59. Myanmar is enjoying peace and stability and achieving discernible progress in economic development. It also enjoys good and friendly relations with all its neighbours. Moreover, as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Myanmar is actively involved in the Association's activities for promoting regional peace, stability and prosperity and enhancing cooperation in the Asia Pacific region.

60. Myanmar takes an active part in subregional cooperation initiatives such as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical Cooperation and the Asia Cooperation Dialogue. These are noteworthy frameworks for closer economic and social cooperation among neighbouring countries.

61. On the political front, the Government is in the process of implementing its seven-step political road map to ensure a smooth transition to a disciplined and modern democratic nation. The first crucial step of the process was the successful reconvening of the National Convention. It was attended by 1,088 delegates from

eight strata representing all walks of life. Sixty per cent of the delegates come from the national races. Representatives of 17 armed groups who have returned to the legal fold are also participating in the National Convention. The delegates are laying down the basic principles for a new democratic State constitution by which to build a common future after decades of disunity and stagnation.

62. A constitution will then be drafted in accordance with the principles agreed upon and will be put to a national referendum. The constitution thus adopted will pave the way for elections to the national and regional parliaments, thereby ensuring a smooth transition to democracy. Myanmar is now poised at the threshold of a new era. The Government is firm in its resolve to pursue the charted seven-step road map to democracy. Myanmar deserves the understanding and goodwill of the international community at this critical time in its transition to democracy.